

# Plankinton St. John



Plankinton (Aurora County) St. John

In 1880, 12 miles east of White Lake, a settlement named Merrill developed -- but when the railroad company purchased Ira Woodson's homestead and platted it for a townsite, it was named Plankinton for John H. Plankinton, a Milwaukee meat packer and director of the road. The town was organized in 1881. On December 8 that year Father F. G. Tobin of Mitchell offered the first Holy Mass at Plankinton in Brooks Hotel. Two years later Plankinton became a regular station of Mitchell, visited every month by Father E. M. Hennessy. He offered Mass in a room above the Stransky Hardware Store.

The year 1883 was marked by a great influx of land-seekers. The railroad was strained to carry immigrants' freight. Plankinton, the county seat, was a principle point of detrainning. In one effort to get Catholics in the area to build a church, Father P. V. Gaudemus was engaged in 1884 to preach a mission which he did in the only place available, a rollerskating rink. A foundation for a church was laid in the west part of town, but the church was never built. Then a schoolhouse was purchased, moved and converted into a Catholic church. It was blessed on Sept. 9, 1886, and served the parish for 11 years.

While Father Joseph B. Wilhelm was at White Lake (1884-86), he offered Mass every month at St. Patrick's Parish. A Father Meekins temporarily had charge of it and also of Mount-Vernon. After that priests of Mitchell or White Lake resumed ministering to the Catholics until 1903 when the parish received its first resident pastor, Father Lawrence Kerley.

While Father M. Sevik came out of White Lake to minister to the



Second St. John's Church  
Built By Reverend G. Hoffman  
In 1894

# Platte St. Peter



FIRST CATHOLIC CHURCH BUILT IN PLATTE

Our first St. Peter the Apostle church here at Platte was constructed during 1905-1906, under the supervision of a non-resident Priest, Father O'Meara, who was a Pastor at Geddes and Armour with Platte as a Mission. It is reported that he was a dedicated Priest, who experienced many hardships in early days, as did many of the early day Priests.

About 1950, he told the writer at Watertown that he traveled across the prairies by horseback and buggy in all kinds of weather to say Mass, baptize babies, and to bury the dead. Monsignor O'Meara, now deceased, served many of his later years as Pastor at Watertown.

The first resident Pastor at St. Peter church, Platte, S. Dak., was Father John Burke, who came here in 1906, after serving as Pastor at Geddes for a year or two. He was a kind, but strict, Irish Priest, who spent his youth underground as a coal miner in Pennsylvania. He supervised the construction of the present rectory, about the year of 1906-1907. Jake Steffen of Geddes worked as a carpenter's assistant on the rectory.

While Rev. John Burke served as Pastor, the St. Peter church membership was about the same in number as our present envelope register enrollment. There were many, many more farmers in the trade area and a greater number and variety of business houses in town. As an example, the young city of Platte supported five or more saloons, a cigar factory, Peggy the Tailor, a jewelry store, two hotels, a dress-making shop, two hat shops for ladies, a sorghum mill, six grain elevators, a flour mill, at least three doctors, at least three attorneys, not less than two dentists, a crew operating a local electric light plant, and three livery stables. Liverymen leased out horses and buggies to traveling men to solicit the stores at Wheeler, Academy, Bijou Hills, Joubert, New Holland and Dunlap, and to other persons as well, including courting couples.

Furthermore, there were two weekly newspapers, three banks and three lumber yards. Train crews lived here for the operation of daily freight and passenger service.

### CHURCH ATTENDANCE LESS IN EARLY DAYS

In spite of a larger population in early days, however, church attendance was more limited than it is today, because of horse and buggy travel, dirt trail roads and adverse weather conditions.

### EARLY RECORDS INCOMPLETE

The writer does not have positive proof of every item of information contained in this article. Prior to the organization of an established Catholic church and rectory in Platte, S. Dak., there was no hard and fast system of keeping records in an orderly manner. Now the books and records are kept in a precise and meticulous order. Some early day records of our parish were brought to Yankton, Kimball, Armour, Wagner, Geddes, and White Lake, and down through the years some records were lost or misplaced or accidentally burned.

The present-day system requires that the Priest keep a careful record of burials, baptisms, marriages, converts, First Communion, Confirmation, and he must give a strict accounting of all yearly receipts and disbursements handled by him as well as a multiplicity of other papers and records, including a complete financial account of receipts and expenditures to the Bishop each year.

### MISSIONS SERVED FROM ST. PETER PARISH, PLATTE

During his pastorate here at Platte, from 1916 to 1921, Rev. J. J. McGrath served one Sunday each month at St. Vincent's Church in Springfield or alternately at St. Bernard's, Running Water, S. Dak., in Bon Homme County. Running Water was a river town on a spur railroad about ten miles up river from Springfield, where the clear water of the Niobrara river temporarily intersected the muddy Missouri.

Early day transportation of the Priest was by passenger train to Tyndall, then a transfer to another railroad to the Missions. The spur track has since been removed west of Springfield. Travel by car was questionable due to dirt roads and bad weather, and Father McGrath had no car. Sunday collections were meager and he occasionally had to borrow or beg money for transportation back to headquarters.

Father Gruenbeck and Father Rowan, respectively, served the two above mentioned Missions until 1928, but by car transportation. St. Willibrod's at Robey was assigned as a Mission of St. Peter, Platte, in 1940, three years after Father Healy became a Pastor here and it has continued to be a Mission since that time.

The churches at Springfield and Running Water have been closed for a long time, as have many other Missions in the Diocese, because of limited membership or because the parishioners failed to bear their just share for the support of the Priest at the parent church.



# Stickney St. Mary



Stickney (Aurora County) St. Mary

Stickney grew up along the Milwaukee Road. Catholics received their first resident pastor in the person of Father J. P. Anger for whom they built a large rectory in 1910. While serving in Plankinton Father Michael Kelly ministered to Stickney also and directed the Catholics there to erect a church (30x40) in 1909. On August 17, 1910, it was dedicated and a bell consecrated....So well did the people cooperate that their entire parish debt was paid by 1918. Other priests ministering in St. Mary's Parish were Fathers A. J. Kres (1912-16), F. N. Scheier (1916-18), F. E. Stenzel (1918-28), F. V. Duggan (1928-36) and H. Ling (1937-40). Father Stenzel enlarged and improved the church building. After 1940 the 40 Catholic households were attended from Plankinton. (CB)



# Woonsocket St. Wilfrid



Woonsocket (Sanborn County) St. Wilfrid

Woonsocket attracted settlers in 1882 because it was a railroad junction. The population of Forestburg ten miles east of it moved with their buildings to the junction. The name Milwaukee Junction gave way to Woonsocket which became the county seat. In 1883 the railroad company drilled for water and struck a stream at 50 feet which has supplied the town ever since. French Canadians from Jefferson were among the first settlers.

In January of 1884 the first recorded Catholic religious service was held in the home of Cornelius Carr by Father John C. Ahern. After the public school was erected in 1885, baptisms and weddings were held there until a church could be built. In 1885 Catholics built a small church 25x30 ft. where Prior Lake now is. Because of meager resources the building was not lathed or plastered until 1889. The priest from Diana came periodically to serve the people.

In 1889 Bishop Marty assigned Father Claude Ebner, O.S.B., to St. Wilfrid's Parish, including the missions of Letcher, Artesian, Wilfred and Roswell. Father Claude visited these at least once a month. A fair held on Feb. 13, 1886, for the benefit of the church netted enough to meet the most pressing bills. From 1888 to 1890 the pastor lived in a rented house until a rectory was provided in Nov. of 1890. That year Bishop Marty had confirmed a class at St. Wilfrid's and used the occasion to answer in a public lecture a slanderous attack on Jesuits delivered shortly before by the Presbyterian Rev. Charles P. Richardson. The bishop encouraged the Catholics to provide a larger church building. However, the brief stays of Father Charles Sass (1897-98) and John Jaspers (1899-99) -- the latter a saintly but sickly person, were not conducive to expansion. With the arrival of Father Benedict Birke in 1899, the work got underway. He was a zealous priest and was able to enlarge the church and improve the grounds. Every week he drove 12 miles with horse and buggy to give religious instructions. In 1903 he handed the parish over to the Eudist Fathers.

Woonsocket made great progress under the guidance of the Eudist priests. The school taught by Presentation Sisters since 1908 was flourishing. The time appeared opportune to complete the erection of the church which had been interrupted by World War I. Father Joseph Turgeon, C.M.J., pastor since 1911, had the assistance of Fathers J. Nis and F. Bonter. The new brick church was dedicated on June 23, 1920, and placed under the patronage of the Holy Heart of Mary. The Eudist Fathers, however, did not enjoy the fruits of their labors for long. They were recalled to Canada in Sept. of that year, and Father J. P. Duffey of the diocese assumed the pastorate. In 1923 he was succeeded by Father M. Kelly who gave seven years of his life to the parish. Because of difficult times, the high school department -- active since 1911 -- was closed in 1926. Two years later the basement of the church was remodeled

to serve as a parish hall. In 1930 the Fathers of the Third Order Regular of St. Francis were given charge of Woonsocket. Catholic... Boarding facilities at the Woonsocket school were also closed in 1926... In the fall of 1932 the orphans from the burned out orphanage at Turton were moved to the boarding facilities of St. Joseph School in Woonsocket. The remained two years until they were moved to the vacated Columbus College plant.

St. Wilfrid's Parish did well under the care of the Third Order Fathers who also cared for parishes and missions at Wessington Springs, Crow Lake, Carthage, Roswell, Brisbane and Lake Andes from their center at Woonsocket. As the growth and depression ended, Father Edward Carocher, TOR, and the people were able to rid the parish of its debt which dated back to the building of the church and school. There were 175 households in the parish and 105 children in the grade school. Boarding facilities were restored at the school in 1954, but when, at length, it was found necessary to close St. Joseph's School in 1968, the building was sold to the local school district.

